

NEGATRENDS: LARGER MACROSOCIAL ISSUES THAT HAVE BESET AMERICAN SOCIETY IN THE LAST THIRTY YEARS

Dr. Ivan Chompalov

Associate Professor
Department of Sociology
Edinboro University of Pennsylvania
295 Meadville Street, 342 Centennial Hall
Edinboro, PA 16444, USA

Dr. Lubomir Popov

Associate Professor
School of Family and Consumer Sciences
Bowling Green State University
309 Johnston Hall
Bowling Green, OH 43403-0059, USA

Abstract

In the past thirty years a large body of research was devoted to the so-called “megatrends,” such as a transition to an information society from an industrial one; from a national economy to a global market place; from centralization to decentralization; and several others. While these new developments are mostly positive, the focus of this paper is on a different and not so well-researched topic—negative trends which have germinated in American society that we term “negatrends.” Using various sources of data, we identify ten such negatrends: rampant individualism and preference for the laissez faire; the fusion of big money and big politics which undermines democracy; the “wilding of America;” the switch from long-term to short-term focus; the strong belief in American exceptionalism; growing anti-intellectualism; intolerance for other viewpoints; extreme consumerism; overemphasis on quantity rather than quality; rising insecurity and fear. The implications and consequences of these negative longitudinal trends are discussed.

Keywords: megatrends, negatrends, economic crisis, anti-intellectualism, American exceptionalism, money and politics, consumerism, individualism

1. Introduction

In the past thirty years or so a large body of research was devoted to the so-called “megatrends,” a term made popular by John Naisbitt’s book by the same name published in 1982. These broad historical tendencies were an elaboration on earlier influential futuristic research chiefly by Alvin Toffler and Daniel Bell. Toffler (1970) popularized the term “future shock” as a general sense of loss of solid orientation and persistent stress due to individuals being overrun by rapid and drastic social changes in a very short period of time such as accelerated scientific and technological innovation and the communications revolution which lead to “information overload.” Daniel Bell (1973) extended this analysis and coined the term “post-industrial society” to describe a new type of dominant social system achieved by the most developed societies and characterized by a shift from manufacturing to services as the dominant economic sector, the centrality of knowledge-based industries, an unusual abundance and variety of goods that leads to an extremely high standard of living, pervasive globalization and automation, and the rise of new technocratic elites that redefine the basis of the social stratification system.

Building on this tradition, Naisbitt (1982) identified and analyzed ten conspicuous and far-reaching megatrends: a transition to an information society from an industrial one; from technology being forced into use to technology being pulled into use where it is more appealing to people; from short-term to long-term perspectives (we disagree with this trend); from a national economy to a global market place; from centralization to decentralization; from getting help through institutions to self-help; from representative to participative democracy; from hierarchies to networking; from a Northeastern bias to a Southwestern one; from seeing things as “either/or” to having more choices.

While the ten new developments, labeled “megatrends” are mostly positive or neutral, the focus of this paper is quite different—mainly on negative trends that have germinated in American society over the past several decades and that we term “negatrends.”

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in its monthly Bulletin in May, 2009 that nonfarm employment had continued its decline in the month of April, 2009 and that the official unemployment rate had risen from 8.5 to 8.9 percent. The Bulletin further said that the U.S. Department of Labor had reported the alarming fact that since the beginning of the current recession back in December of 2007 we have lost approximately 5.7 million jobs. The job losses were very large and widespread across all major private-sector industries. By the beginning of 2009 more than \$8 trillion of the taxpayers’ money was committed to help financial institutions and unfreeze credit markets. The real size of the total bailout by the beginning of 2010 has been estimated at \$14.4 trillion, out of which only about 7 percent has been paid off (Corn, 2010). So far this strategy has not worked out very well. While it is true that without the bailouts and the economic stimulus the situation might have been a lot worse, it is also clear that we are still in a prolonged economic slump and not entirely out of the woods yet. While the banks and other financial institutions, especially the “too big to fail” ones have nicely recovered and are posting record profits and bonuses for their chief executives, the middle and working class, as well as the poor, have seen an erosion of their earnings, loss of job security, the further weakening especially of public employee labor unions, and cuts in social spending. Nevertheless, the government announced that in June, 2009 the economic recession was officially over. But is a “jobless recovery” any indication that the crisis has passed? Is the current unemployment rate of 8.5 percent not a proof that the crisis is still ongoing?

Most ordinary people would disagree with this government assessment in view of the continuing inflation, the erratic behavior of the stock market, the continued layoffs, and the difficulty of finding a job. In short, we have been in and are experiencing the most severe and wide-ranging recession in our history since the Great Depression of 1929. The current economic crisis brought to the fore a number of social problems, or harmful conditions that negatively affect a segment of the population or the population as a whole and are a matter of public controversy. Social problems do not just pop up in a vacuum. They always happen in a particular social system or begin as a result of specific policies and changes. Even global problems are often caused by a small group of dominant countries adopting a given vision of the world and then implementing it accordingly. From that vantage point, it behooves us to take stock of the larger structural deficiencies in our society that have developed in the U. S. over the past three decades or so and that are indeed the source of the majority of deleterious conditions we label social problems.

2. Negatrends

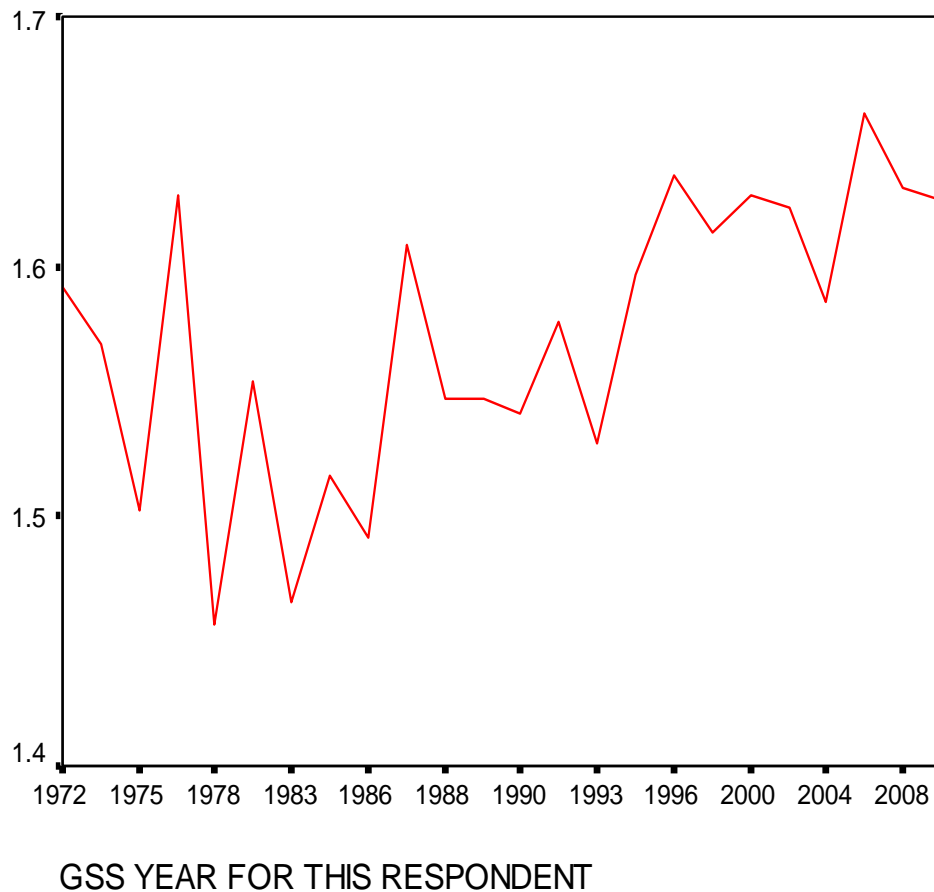
The following ten such negative trends are what we call “negatrends”: rampant individualism and preference for the *laissez faire*; the fusion of big money and big politics which undermines democracy; the “wilding of America;” the switch from long-term to short-term focus; the strong belief in American exceptionalism; growing anti-intellectualism; intolerance for other viewpoints; extreme consumerism; overemphasis on quantity rather than quality; rising insecurity and fear. Drawing from a variety of sources and our own analysis, we have identified the most prominent undercurrents that impede positive social change. The implications and consequences of these negative longitudinal trends are discussed below.

2.1 From Individualism to Egoism to Social Disasters

Rampant individualism and unabashed preference for the *laissez faire* (anything goes, or pull out all the stops and restraints on the free market) form of capitalism have unfortunately become strong undercurrents in American social life and public policy. This mentality has led up to the current deep economic recession that is ravaging our economy and other social institutions. This thrust has also led to an ever widening polarization in our society, so that nowadays we have the largest income inequality among all First World countries (today the average CEO in the U.S. makes 400 times the income of the average worker as compared with just 40 times in 1980). One consequence is the swelling of the ranks of the poor and especially the fast growth of the group of people known as the “working poor.” Another is the shrinking of the middle class, a class that made America great in the past. The *laissez faire* attitude undermines the chances for improving the social infrastructure, higher education, and the collective systems of insurance in healthcare and retirement. While we are not propagating a fully minted welfare state, the unpredictable nature of life and the turns of faith can be mitigated best by some form of insurance that allows coverage of unpredictable emergencies.

This will help individuals to develop a stronger confidence in their future and will provide a long-term perspective in life. We hope that the “seize the day” and “look out for number one” mentality will gradually fade out in favor of a more positive approach to planning a life trajectory. As a result, in a number of social groups we will witness an increase in loyalty to society, altruistic behavior, work ethics, and respect for social norms. Needless to say, this involves the restoration of trust in other individuals and their motives, which right now is at a very low point, as the figure below, based on analysis of trends overtime using the cumulative General Social Survey (GSS) data, demonstrates.

Figure 1: Whether People Are Helpful Or Look Out for Themselves



Note: The question of whether people are helpful or looking out for themselves is coded as 1. Helpful; 2. Looking out for self.

2.2 The Collusion of Big Money and Big Politics and the Erosion of Democracy

The fusion of big money and big politics results in infusion of money into politics and the concentration of more and more money, power, and other resources in the hands of a smaller and smaller group of individuals at the expense of a larger and larger segment of the population below them. Such an expansion of the influence of this “power elite” (Mills 1956) in our domestic and international affairs poses a threat to democracy and hampers a larger citizens’ input in decision-making.

Total political campaign spending has been continually growing and in the latest 2010 midterm elections exceeded 4 billion dollars, with the upcoming 2012 presidential campaign only expected to set a new record for presidential campaign fundraising over the 2008 figure of about 1.7 billion dollars. Pouring larger and larger amounts of money into politics by corporations, Political Action Committees (PACs), Super PACs, individuals, and various interest groups has become so common that now it is expected. This makes sense, because there is a very strong correlation between campaign spending and whether a candidate gets elected or not.

Thus, spending more money on particular candidates makes rational sense since it leads to favorable policies once they get in office. However, it also means that the impact of money on the political process becomes stronger and stronger at the expense of groups and categories of people who do not possess a lot of resources. In short, this poses a danger for broader political participation and for democracy. Going back to the increase in both fundraising and spending, the following table clearly demonstrates the historical trend of more and more money being raised and spent on presidential campaigns. The shocking statistic is that presidential contributions doubled between the 2004 and 2008 elections (in absolute numbers, not adjusted for inflation). Even if we use constant dollars and take account of inflation (approximately 2.5% annually), we still end up with a 90 percent increase between the last two cycles—a mind-boggling fact, especially since the country has already been in an economic recession for almost a year!

Table 1: Presidential Fundraising and Spending, 1976 – 2008

Total Presidential Candidates*	Contributions		to
	Total Receipts		
	Year	Total In millions	
	2008	\$1,748.8	
	2004	\$880.5	
	2000	\$528.9	
	1996	\$425.7	
	1992	\$331.1	
	1988	\$324.4	
	1984	\$202.0	
	1980	\$161.9	
	1976	\$171.0	
	Primary Receipts General Election Public Funding General Election Private Funding Convention Public Funding		
Total Presidential Candidates*	Spending		by
	Total Spent		
	Year	Total* In millions	
	2008	\$1,324.7	
	2004	\$717.9	
	2000	\$343.1	
	1996	\$239.9	
	1992	\$192.2	
	1988	\$210.7	
	1984	\$103.6	
	1980	\$92.3	
	1976	\$66.9	

NOTE: The source for these data is the Center for Responsive Politics. All the numbers on this page are based on the Center’s summary reports filed January 31, 2009.

And things are only getting worse. In January, 2010 the Supreme Court of the United States voted 5 to 4 in favor of the conservative group *Citizens United* and ruled that the government may not ban political spending by corporations in candidate elections, thus overruling two important precedents about the First Amendment rights of corporations (Liptak, 2010).

President Obama called it “a major victory for big oil, Wall Street banks, health insurance companies and the other powerful interests that marshal their power every day in Washington to drown out the voices of everyday Americans.” Thus, there is a real danger that the court’s ruling will reshape the way elections are conducted in allowing unrestricted increase in corporate spending on political candidates and further undermining the democratic process. This decision in favor of big business had an immediate effect on the 2010 midterm elections, with the “Tea Party,” which *Citizens United* quickly aligned itself with, gaining a large number of seats for Republican candidates who are friendly to the movement and securing control of the House of Representatives for the Republican Party.

2.3 The “Wilding of America”

The recent “wilding of America” (Derber, 2007) boils down to ambition, competitiveness, careerism, and greed that advance the self at the cost of others and is accompanied by a total or near total disregard of other people and the community. “Expressive and instrumental wilding have in common an anti-social self-centeredness made possible by a stunning collapse of moral restraint and a chilling lack of empathy” (Derber, 2007, p. 9). The last 100 years or so of American history can be viewed as a succession of periods of wilding and civility. We have been at our best and a shining beacon of freedom, democracy, prosperity, and ingenuity for the rest of the world during periods of civility (the Progressive Era, World War II and the post-war generous rebuilding of Western Europe and Japan under the Marshall Plan, the Turbulent 1960s) and at our worst during periods of wilding, including the last 30 years or so.

The current economic crisis is a good example of the consequences of wilding. One common explanation of how we ended up in the greatest economic calamity after the Great Depression focuses on greed and excess run amok, because we have let private interest trump the public good (Dorgan, 2009). And, indeed, humongous executive salaries and bonuses not linked to performance, war profiteering, high finance and oil market manipulation (remember, as recently as the summer of 2008 and then again in early summer of 2011 a gallon cost over \$4 at the gas pump), escalating health-care costs, the subprime loan scandal, media concentration, and tax cuts for the rich are just some examples that prove former senator Dorgan’s point. In Dorgan’s view, out of the shortsighted, greedy, and ignorant actions that helped create the economic collapse, the most damaging was the action of President Clinton and Congress in 1999 to repeal the bank protections put in place during the Great Depression to prevent the dismal bank speculation that led up to the Great Depression from ever happening again.

That was the infamous Financial Services Modernization Act created mainly by Republican Senator Phil Gramm from Texas. The Act repealed the post-depression legislation and allowed the establishment of large holding companies to create diversification and one-stop-shopping in the financial sector. The door for speculation, financial gambling with other people’s money, duping naïve poor folks into buying houses they couldn’t afford, the explosion of “exotic stocks” and complicated financial bundles very few people understood, was thus wide open and greed reigned supreme. The end result is only too painfully obvious. As is the fact that lack of accountability and permissiveness to use other people’s money to gamble and, when you lose, make the taxpayers pay for the consequences, while you get bailed out, is not only morally wrong but downright economically hurtful and demoralizing.

Wilding is not only confined to domestic behavior but includes decisions and actions with global implications. Suffice it to say that our recent international policy and overuse of resources have been the wrong lesson that other countries are learning fast. Only 4 percent of the world’s population inhabits the United States, yet we consume 25 percent of the world’s resources or more than six times the average. If we continue down this path, there is a real danger that the world and we as an important part of it will experience “The Tragedy of the Commons” (Hardin, 1968; Hardin, 1993). The metaphor refers to the dangers of the clash between personal rights and collective welfare in our use of resources. The term *commons* refers to any resource, shared by a group of people. If every person uses the common resource prudently, it will last for a long time and benefit everybody. On the other hand, if some or all people act only based on their self-interest and try to control as much of the resource as they can get away with, without regard of other people’s needs, soon the common resource will be exhausted and destroyed, which will then lead to collective suffering.

2.4 The Shift from a Long-Term Vision to a Short-Term Focus

Short-term solutions at the expense of long-term policy and the seeking of immediate gratification and fast rewards have lately become the order of the day.

Recently, there has been a lack of political foresight and a penchant for patch-up solutions to avert immediate problems. This also means lack of anticipation, often unscientific “gut feeling” political decisions, and not thinking important policies through after soliciting broadly based input from the citizenry. Thus, there is a lack of political will to tackle underlying, long-term structural problems and a preference for “patch-up” temporary fixes of short-term problems that pay high political dividends. A good example of this “negatrend” would be the overemphasis on short-term profits based on the trading of unsound securities, which led to the financial crisis in the United States and subsequently to plunging the world in an economic recession of epic proportions that will take years to recover from. There was no dearth of explanations of how we ended up in this economic mess. In a recent speech on the state of the economy President Obama blamed a flaw in our political system that let things get so out of hand, namely the tendency of Washington to put off the tough decisions and score quick political points, as well as a short attention span that is attuned to the 24 hour news cycle and insists on instant gratification in the form of immediate results or higher poll numbers. He also mentions that the existing economic system where 40 percent of the corporate profits come from a financial sector which relies too heavily on inflated home prices, is unsustainable.

2.5 The Pitfalls of Exceptionalism

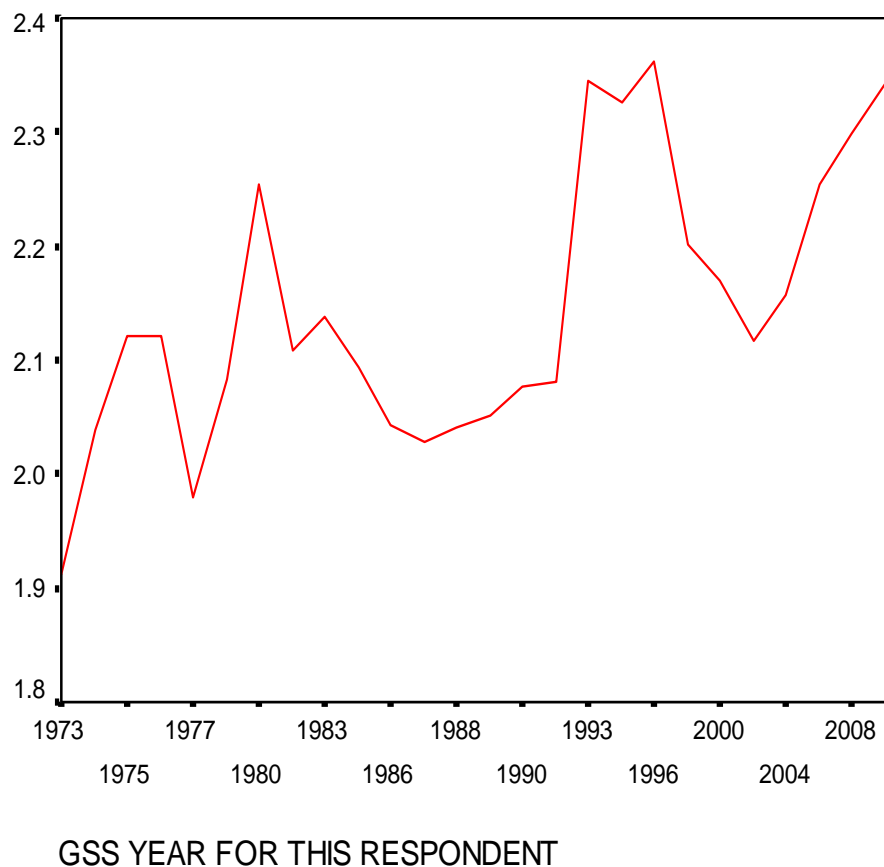
In the past thirty years or so we have witnessed a resurrection of the strong belief in American exceptionalism, or the view that we occupy a special place in the world, are a nation chosen by God, that we have a superior insight on the world and what is best for everybody. Often this is interpreted by other nations as arrogance and “throwing our weight around.” As Jacoby points out, secular Europe is worried about the growing influence of the anti-rational stream of the American religious landscape, which fuels exceptionalism: “In 2003, a survey by *The Economist* concluded that “Europeans consider religion...the strangest and most disturbing feature of American exceptionalism. They worry that fundamentalists are hijacking the country. They find it extraordinary that three times as many Americans believe in the virgin birth as in evolution. They fear that America will go on a ‘crusade’ ...in the Muslim world or cut aid to poor countries lest it be used for birth control.””(Jacoby, 2008, p. 206). Some repair of our image abroad has already started under the administration of President Obama, but too many peoples still remember our recent proclamation of “You are either with us or with the terrorists.”

2.6 The Fallacies of Growing Anti-Intellectualism

This trend has been noticed by several social observers who have written eloquently about the closing of the American mind (Bloom, 1987) and growing anti-intellectualism (Hofstadter, 1963; Jacoby, 2008). Anti-scientific attitudes in the U.S. are nowadays stronger than those in other developed nations. International comparisons with these nations show that we are the most religious nation, we have the largest percent of people who believe in paranormal and psychic phenomena, we are also more likely to support creationism or insist that both creationism and evolution theory should be taught in schools, because they are ‘just theories.’ We also have a high percent of functional illiteracy and a large number of people who lack knowledge of other countries and their cultures, or even care much about what happens in the rest of the world. This is interesting, considering the emphasis on critical thinking and diversity in U.S. universities and colleges. Students have to take general education classes in cultural diversity, international perspectives, and critical thinking, so formally they are exposed to a lot of diversity information, but in reality we see just the opposite.

2.7 Partisanship and Intolerance

Hardened ideological positions and intolerance for other viewpoints, which is often accompanied by disinterestedness in the facts that might potentially undermine our own beliefs, have become more pronounced. Much of this attitude is fanned by the media that caters to either the extreme right or the extreme left, but not much to middle America, and keeps regurgitating the same message from the same talking heads. A prime illustration of this unfortunate development is the unrelenting obstructionism of the Republican party leadership to reasonable and inherently nonpartisan public policy proposals, such as increasing the debt ceiling, which led in the summer of 2011 to the downgrade of the credit rating of U.S. government bonds by Standard & Poor’s, or the last-minute delay by the Republican-led House of Representatives of the Senate-passed bill in December of 2011 to extend the payroll tax cut and unemployment benefits for two months. These actions were unabashedly couched in the rhetorical message of “whatever it takes to make sure Obama is a one-term president.” This stance has led to a *de facto* paralysis of meaningful political debate and extreme ineffectiveness and impotence of the highest legislative body, which unsurprisingly is reflected in a divided and extremely polarized public opinion and reduced confidence in Congress’s ability to do its job, as the following graph indicates.

Figure 2: Confidence in Congress

Note: The question of how much confidence respondents have in Congress was coded as 1. A great deal; 2. Only some; 3. Hardly any.

2.8 Extreme Consumerism, Hedonism, and Cheating to Get Ahead: The Erosion of the Protestant Ethic

Over the last several decades there has been a rise in consumerism, hedonism, and preoccupation with material things combined with what Callahan (2004) has called the “cheating culture,” or a pattern of widespread cheating in politics, business, medicine, education, and a number of other areas in order to get ahead. This amounts to a case of either “trickle up” or “trickle down” abrogation of moral responsibility and leads to another ethically and spiritually damaging phenomenon—the lack of accountability and personal responsibility. In essence, this is just the opposite of what Max Weber (1958) attributed to the rise of capitalism as the most successful economic system in history—the “Protestant Ethic.”

One manifestation of this negatrend is the business approach to art and education, which are treated more and more as commodities. In other words, if it sells, it is good. Catering to the tastes of the masses and promoting populism in art and education is nowadays the order of the day. When it comes to higher education, grade inflation is endemic and students are encouraged to require that teaching is amusing, entertaining, and hedonistic. Pizza and soda become part of the teaching method. Extending tertiary education to 75 percent of the high school graduates is a laudable goal, but not when at the same time bringing standards down so that everyone can pass. There is a heavy emphasis on increasing student numbers that bring state subsidy and on responding to student demands for particular courses, which has brought about a supply and demand model of curriculum development.

2.9 A Recent Overemphasis on Quantity at the Expense of Quality

Examples here abound but a recent article in *Newsweek* (May 23 & 30, 2011) illustrates this larger problem. Hollywood seems to have lapsed into “sequel madness” so much so that 2011 will see a record 27 sequels.

The author of the article, the renowned film critic Robert Ebert, laments that as the leadership of many studios passes from creators to marketers, it is extremely hard to get original and creative ideas financed but easier and easier to market sequels. His unflattering conclusion is that “Our tradition of quality cinema is being abandoned.” Another example is that according to the majority of researchers on obesity, the growth of this epidemic is largely attributed to the increased quantity of lower-quality fast foods at rock bottom prices, which are marketed aggressively by a number of large companies.

2.10 Rising Insecurity and Fear

The long-term trend over the past thirty years or so has been the massive loss of well-paid union-protected jobs with good fringe benefits not only in manufacturing but, more recently, in the “white collar” occupations as well. Labor unions were pretty strong up until the 1970s. But this strength was not to last. One reason was falling support for unions at the highest levels of government. In 1980, Ronald Reagan was elected president; soon after the nation’s air traffic controllers—federal employees—went on strike and President Reagan ordered them back to work. They refused and Reagan responded by firing them all and replacing them. This was an isolated incident but, symbolically, it was a major defeat for organized labor and, as the argument goes, it never really recovered after that. For the past three decades there has been a steady decline in both union membership and influence.

Another conspicuous development here is the rising trend of the “temping of the workplace.” The deindustrialization of the U.S., as well as the spread of low-skilled service work, means that more and more workers are in temporary jobs. As “temps,” workers have little say over their work, and little security about where they will be working in the future (e.g., adjuncts in universities and colleges). Today, more than 30 percent of the American labor force is “temporary” and works without at least some of the benefits that most full-time employees count on, including retirement plans, sick leave, health and dental insurance, and, especially, job security. As a result of this and other changes, such as the media’s emphasis on real and perceived threats, Americans today are more afraid than ever before of man-made and made-up dangers. As Barry Glassner (2010) points out, three out of four Americans state they feel more fearful today than they did twenty years ago. He also claims that as gun-related homicides fell by 20 percent in the 1990s, media coverage of such crime went up by 400 percent and perceptions of crime as a major social problem increased two-fold during the same period.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

We have identified a number of negative developments that have sprung in the last decades and have contributed to particular social problems, disasters, and additional negative trends. These developments can be conceptualized as “negatrends.” The negative longitudinal changes that we refer to as “negatrends” are definitely intertwined and interrelated (e.g., the current financial crisis is a result of short-term objectives and enrichment at any price, the collusion of big money and big politics, greed and rampant individualism, cheating, and extreme consumerism, to name a few). Their isolation and linear arrangement in this paper is tentative and contingent on our goals and media of presentation. We foresee a number of other presentational options. At this time, the organization of the paper was optimized with the goal of raising awareness and spurring debate in the scholarly community and in society. The enumeration of negative trends only is not intended to disparage our great nation. On the contrary, by raising these problems we would like to contribute to a public sociology and a public debate on improving our society at a time when it is facing one of the greatest financial calamities of the last hundred years. Our society pays a high price for continuing on the same path and disregarding the social consequences of increased poverty, unacceptably high unemployment rate, rise in white collar crime, high foreclosure rates, erosion of social services, growing pessimism about the future, and a number of others, such as investing in the wrong priorities (for example, in the past we made a substantial investment in science, technology, education, and infrastructure, whereas recently we have witnessed expansion of prisons, cuts in social programs, erosion of work protection, and a defunding of science, technology and education).

Can we do something to fix these problems? Yes, we can. For starters, we can take some advice from a devoted public servant, former senator Byron Dorgan, who expresses optimism that we can overcome the current economic crisis with its attendant social problems and makes the following suggestions: “Still, all of us have to believe that our country has the collective wisdom and the courage to take actions to restore economic health. Much of what we need to do is just common sense:

- We have to reign in federal spending and begin to balance our federal budget. That means fixing the longer-term financing problems with Medicare and Social Security as well.

- Our \$700-billion-a-year trade deficit has to be reduced. No country can run a large long-term trade deficit without serious consequences to its economy.
- Government regulators must be held accountable. The free market works, but it needs referees in the form of regulators.
- We need to revisit and reinstate some of the postdepression laws that prohibit banks from being involved in the kinds of investments that cause their collapse. That means separating fundamental banking functions from the risks of securities and real estate speculation.

We can do all of these things. It has been a hard time both in the United States and around the world as the economic crisis spreads throughout the global economy, and our optimistic American spirit is being tested. But we will learn from this, and I know our country will emerge wiser, stronger, and, in the end, greater.”(Dorgan, 2009, p. xvi).

Finally, we have advanced no claims of causality, for which a higher standard of proof and more systematic analysis of empirical data are required, although we firmly believe that the previously discussed ten negative trends are very important and are interrelated in particular ways that generate profound implications for both current social problems and the future direction of America. Our objectives will be achieved when this exploratory analysis attracts the attention of the research community and stimulates other colleagues to engage in researching particular negatrends, their interrelationships, impacts, and consequences. We also envisage an array of research programs and a paradigmatic framework that will expand the presently proposed ideas, will delve into intriguing details, and will further explain the mechanisms behind the processes and trends that we have delineated. Such work will hopefully help academics and practitioners chart plans and programs for alleviating social problems, strengthening the foundation of our society, and fostering economic growth and high quality of life.

REFERENCES

- Bell, D. (1973). *The coming of post-industrial society*. New York: Harper Colophon Books.
- Bloom, A. (1987). *The closing of the American mind: How higher education has failed democracy and impoverished the souls of today's students*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Callahan, D. (2004). *The cheating culture: why more Americans are doing wrong to get ahead*. New York: Harcourt.
- Corn, D. (January/February 2010). The bailout made Americans hopping mad. So why aren't we furious at the fat cats who caused it? *Mother Jones*, 31-34.
- Derber, C. (2007). *The wilding of America: Money, mayhem, and the new American dream*. (4th ed.). New York: Worth Publishers.
- Domhoff, W. (2002). *Who rules America? Power and politics*. (4th ed.). Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Dorgan, B. (2009). *Reckless! How debt, deregulation, and dark money nearly bankrupted America (and how we can fix it!)*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Ehrenreich, B. (2001). *Nickel and dimed: On how (not) to get by in America*. New York: Holt.
- Glassner, B. (2010). *The culture of fear: Why Americans are afraid of the wrong things*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hardin, G. (1968). The tragedy of the commons. *Science*, 162, 1243-1248.
- Hardin, G. (1993). *Living within limits: Ecology, economics, and population taboos*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hofstadter, R. (1963). *Anti-intellectualism in American life*. New York: Knopf.
- Jacoby, S. (2008). *The age of American unreason*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Liptak, A. (January 21, 2010). Justices, 5-4, reject corporate spending limit. *New York Times*.
- Mills, C. W. (1956). *The power elite*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mills, C. W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Naisbitt, J. (1982). *Megatrends: Ten new directions transforming our lives*. Mass Market Paperback.
- Newsweek* (May 23 & 30, 2011).
- Toffler, A. (1970). *Future shock*. New York: Random House.
- Weber, M. (1958 [1904]). *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. New York: Scribner's.
- Wilson, C. (2006). *Public policy: Continuity and change*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.